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SUBJECT: GOZ TELLS AMBASSADOR, WFP FOOD SITUATION UNDER
CONTROL

Classified By: Classified by Eric T. Schultz, reasons 1.4 (b)(d)

Summary

1. (C) In a June 2 meeting with the Ambassador, Minister for Social Welfare Nicholas Goche said Zimbabwe faced a shortfall of 1.2 million metric tons of maize, but that the GOZ had already locked in enough imports from South Africa to cover the shortfall. In that framework, the GOZ was prepared to accept international assistance. Goche added that the GOZ was also trying to build up a strategic reserve. The Ambassador responded that we would only provide food if asked and if needed. He urged Goche to keep in mind that it would take several months for U.S. food to reach southern Africa. At a June 1 meeting with the diplomatic corps, WFP Executive Director James Morris had reported receiving a similar message and noted that the GOZ had 60 days to increase imports or ask for assistance before food stocks were depleted and serious shortages ensued. He also said he had delivered a personal message from Kofi Annan to Mugabe on the GOZ's recent crackdown. End Summary.

Goche Waxes Panglossian

2. (C) Goche said because of drought in February and March the maize harvest would be on the order of only 800,000 MTs. In times of drought, farmers tended to keep a larger percentage of their harvest. The GOZ was therefore planning to receive only about 300,000 MTs from the harvest, against a national need of 1.5 million MTs. The government had taken quick action earlier this year to fill the 1.2 million shortfall. The GOZ had contracted at favorable prices to import the full amount from South Africa and was currently receiving roughly 25,000 MTs a week. The food was likely to be distributed through the food for work program, as well as commercially.

3. (C) However, Goche said there was a parallel effort underway by other arms of the government to bring in additional imports and to build up the country's reserves. The goal was to import 35,000 MTs a week. He would personally not rest easy until they reached that figure, which would give the country a margin of safety. Goche said international assistance was welcome within this framework, which was what he and President Mugabe had told the visiting Executive Director of the UN's World Food Program (WFP), James Morris, the day before.

Ambassador: Don't Wait Too Long To Ask

4. (C) The Ambassador responded that the U.S. traditionally provided the bulk of WFP food assistance, especially maize. The U.S. was prepared to respond to a request from Zimbabwe for assistance provided a clear need was demonstrated. The U.S. owed it to its citizens not to choke Zimbabwe with food assistance, in the colorful words of President Mugabe, if it was not really needed. He noted that it took a minimum of three months to procure and ship U.S. corn to southern Africa and advised Goche to keep this delay in mind should an appeal ultimately be forthcoming. Goche took the point, noting that the real minimum time needed was more likely to be six months.

NGO Role

5. (C) The Ambassador noted that distribution would be key. He understood that Morris and President Mugabe had agreed that WFP would use its traditional NGO implementing partners. In that regard, he advised that the overall climate for NGOs was important and that the GOZ needed to reduce the bureaucratic demands it placed on them. Goche said the GOZ had agreed to use the WFP's traditional formula should an

appeal be needed. It had worked well in the past and there was no reason to depart from it. This included an umbrella MOU between the WFP and GOZ that would cover the activities of all NGOs (contrary to what he had told Morris the day before) that each NGO would need a separate MOU). He added that the GOZ regarded most NGOs favorably, it was only a handful that had failed to comply with Zimbabwe laws that had created problems.

Morris Visit

16. (C) At a June 1 luncheon, WFP,s Morris provided the diplomatic corps with a readout of his visit. He said he had come with a private message for Mugabe from Kofi Annan on the GOZ,s recent crack down, which Morris would only note included an appeal to treat people &humanely.8 On food assistance, Morris said Mugabe had told him the GOZ was importing 1.2 million MTs for immediate needs and another 600,000 MTs for their reserve. In that regard, there had been no response to Morris, request for an estimate of the scale of food needs and the GOZ had stuck to the line that though not needed any help volunteered would be welcome. However, based on field reports, the WFP had increased its estimate of regional needs to 700,000 MTs. He added that the GOZ had food for the next 60 days, after which it could face serious shortages if imports did not arrive or assistance were not provided. In the event of an appeal, Mugabe had agreed to allow the WFP to work through its traditional partners and had agreed that the GOZ would have no role in distribution nor would it interfere.

Comment

17. (C) We are highly dubious that the GOZ has enough foreign exchange to pay for 1.2 million MTs of corn, let alone 1.8 million, and would appreciate the views of Embassy Pretoria,s Ag Counselor on whether South African exports to Zimbabwe have increased. We believe it is equally unlikely the GOZ will be able to distribute such quantities through the food for work program, should they succeed in importing the grain. Finally, if it is true that the GOZ has allocated sufficient foreign exchange to obtain the corn on its own, then it must be at enormous cost to the rest of the economy, including likely prolonged fuel shortages that will cripple economic activity.
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